

## Facts About Alzheimer's Disease

- Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia affecting 4.5 to 4.7 million Americans.
- 1 in 10 Americans over the age of 65 and nearly 1 in 2 Americans over age 85 currently have Alzheimer's disease.
- Alzheimer's disease is a progressive disease which advances in stages from mild forgetfulness and cognitive impairment to wide spread loss of mental abilities and total dependence on a caregiver. The time from the onset of symptoms until death ranges from 3 to 20 years with the average duration lasting about 8 years.
- The progressive loss of cognitive function is accompanied by pathologic (disease associated) changes in the brain.
- Abnormal plaques (comprised of a brain protein called beta amyloid) develop in the spaces between nerve cells and limit the communication between cells, leading to a decrease in cognitive functioning.
- In addition, another protein which normally channels chemical messages inside nerve cells, deforms and collapses into neurofibrillary tangles that appear like twisted bits of thread inside nerve cells, which leads to a loss of nerve cells.
- There is currently no single test used to diagnose Alzheimer's disease. In most cases your doctor will first rule out other diseases that can impact memory by laboratory tests and a physical exam. Neuropsychological tests are used to determine if there is any cognitive impairment.
- The FDA has approved 5 drugs to be used in the treatment of Alzheimer's; memantine (Namenda), tacrine (Cognex), donepezil (Aricept), rivastigmine (Exelon), galantamine (Reminyl). About half of the people taking these medications show modest and temporary improvement in memory and thinking skills.
- Other medications may be prescribed to treat such symptoms as agitation, anxiety and poor sleep.
- Studies have shown that early diagnosis and the creation of a stimulating and supportive environment can be beneficial in slowing the progression of Alzheimer's
- High cholesterol and diets high in saturated fats increase the risk of Alzheimer's disease, while diets high in antioxidants decrease the risk.
- In addition to looking for a cure, researchers are focusing more and more on supporting the caregivers who spend upwards of 13 hours a day caring for loved ones.



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